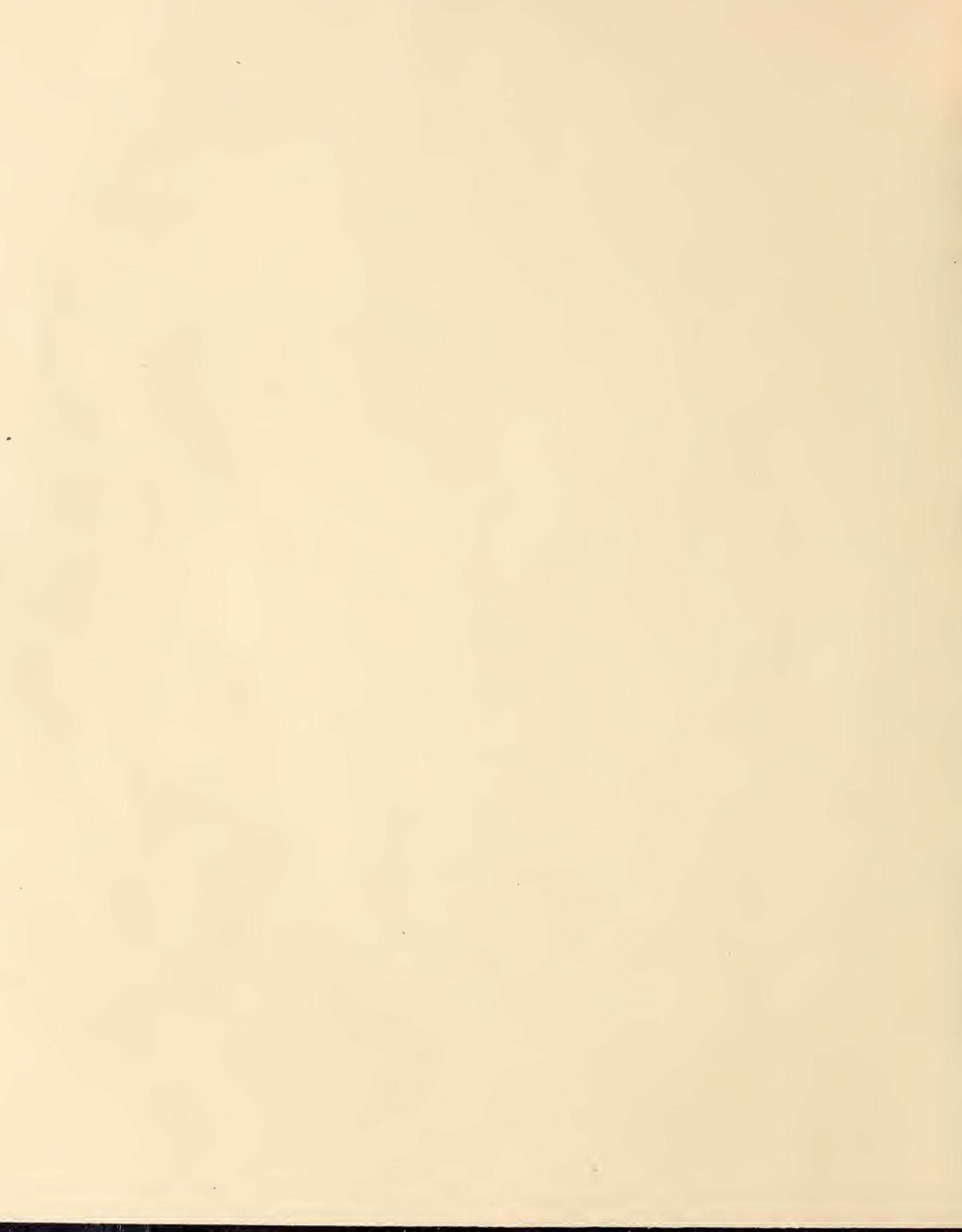


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# THE NATIONAL GRASSLANDS STORY



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • FOREST SERVICE • PA - 607

March 1964.]

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## A DARK DAY ON THE PLAINS

On a spring day in 1935 a man was testifying on a pending bill before a committee in Room 333, Senate Office Building, at the Capitol in Washington. The bill would soon establish the Soil Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture. The big man testifying was Hugh Hammond Bennett, who would become known as the "Father of Soil Conservation."

That day in 1935 the great midsection of America was in trouble, and so was the whole country—in the depth of the Big Depression.

In the Plains States the land groaned in the agony of drought and wind and dust. Above parts of Oklahoma, Texas, Wyoming, Nebraska, and the Dakotas airplanes struggling to 20,000 feet still could not find air free from dirt and sand. Ten-foot drifts of dust stopped highway and rail traffic. People lost their way in black blizzards a

hundred yards from home. Gone was the stir of herds and tractors and busy prosperity. The hopes of men had been driven to flight by fear. This was the Dust Bowl of the early thirties.

Two of the duststorms had blown 2,000 miles to pass over the Nation's Capitol, almost blotting out the sun, and beyond to settle on ship decks 300 miles off shore in the Atlantic Ocean.

Suddenly that day a dark shadow passed over the window of the hearing room. One of the Senators remarked, "It is getting dark." Said another, "Maybe it's dust." It *was* dust.

And Hugh Bennett, pointing out the window, said: "There, gentlemen, goes Oklahoma!"

Hugh Bennett had made his point; the bill soon was law. And this is part of the story of National Grasslands.

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## THE NATIONAL GRASSLANDS STORY

Eastward from the Rocky Mountains sweeps a land of grass, the Great Plains of America. To the west are broad intermountain ranges in Oregon and Idaho. Within these regions are the National Grasslands—nearly 4 million acres of Federal land, managed in the public interest by the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Nineteen National Grasslands are situated in 11 western States; 17 are on the Great Plains, and 1 each is located in Idaho and Oregon. All of them proclaim the importance of a humble plant—grass.

These are truly lands of grass. These windswept plains have seen the pageant of the frontier, the tragedy of the dustbowl, and the wonders of modern agriculture—and all that has passed proclaims man's dependence on grass. From primitive Indian to grassland manager, much of the high plains remains grass country.



What is grass country? It is not endless plains of grass sweeping from horizon to horizon, though this may be found in places. It is many things, with varying terrain. The Great Plains includes the area often referred to as "the breadbasket of the Nation," where vast areas are in private ownership and used for cultivated crops as well as grazing. Grass country is treeless, rolling plains with varying types of soils which dictate, to a great degree, how the land may be used. Interspersed with grasslands are fields of wheat and grain sorghums, alfalfa lowlands, and native meadows.

National Grasslands are generally the marginal lands, poorer soils that are not suitable for cultivation. Many of these lands suffer from past abuse, and are being restored to their original grass cover. They are intermingled with and supplementary to privately owned crop lands and livestock ranches.

Grass is an ageless part of the land. To the Indian grass was eternal, a changeless part of that country, and so it is today. The primitive Indian gave way to civilization; cows replaced buffalo; today we relax amidst man-made luxuries; but grass remains—the permanent basic resource.

Grass remains. It must remain in spite of man's abuse, for it is the key to a whole system of agriculture, a factor in the delicate balance between failure and success. Remove or destroy the grass unwisely, as has been done, and soil blows away, cattle and wildlife decline, and rainfall quickly runs off into silt-choked rivers. Use grass wisely, and the country yields a wealth of nature's ever-renewing resources.

The story of this country is testimony to the power of grass. Each chapter, colorful or tragic, is a part of our heritage—each page tells the story of grass.

There were Indians and the numberless buffalo, cattlemen and great herds on the open range, and homesteaders struggling in a land of uncertain crops. Across this land also passed prospectors, trappers, soldiers, railroad builders, and a host of others who pushed back this last frontier.

But always there was grass, subtly guiding the fate of men. Sometimes grass was lush, and men prospered. Often it was overgrazed, plowed up, or burned by drought, and hard times followed.

This is the story of the National Grasslands. They consist of 24 former Land Utilization Projects, where the Federal Government, the States, and local people are working to rebuild on the ruins of drought-stricken and misused land. The projects began as parts of Department of Agriculture emergency rehabilitation programs in the 1930's. Submarginal farms and depleted rangelands were purchased, the destitute were resettled, and slowly over the years the range was restored to better, wiser, more productive use. Lessons were being learned from hard experience.

The National Grasslands are a sequel to hard experience, and exemplify new thinking about agriculture and resources in grass country. Their highest purpose will be to serve as demonstration areas, to show how lands classified as unsuitable for cultivation may be converted to grass, for the benefit of both land and people. Under careful management they are being developed for greater sustained yields of grass, water, wildlife, and trees; they also offer new opportunities for outdoor recreation. Built upon a foundation of wise management, cooperative effort, and hard work, the National Grasslands will be permanent public wealth, permanently productive.





## PANORAMA OF THE PLAINS

The National Grasslands have a sameness that blurs difference in the landscape. A few colorful features strike a dramatic note in some areas, and man may leave his mark. Yet all in all, the land presents a great panorama of sky, land, and grass.

Is that all? Sky, land, and grass! To a traveler's casual glance that is all. But if you, the reader, travel there, look closer. Look at the handiwork of man; see how the land is used. You may see not only grass, but an economy, a way of life, and a hope for an abundant future.

Grass country supports an economy and a way of life, not with grass alone, but with a blend of resources and products, uses and benefits, which we call multiple use. Keyed to the supremacy of grass, all natural resources are developed, managed, and used for proper land conservation.

### *The Multiple Use Blend*

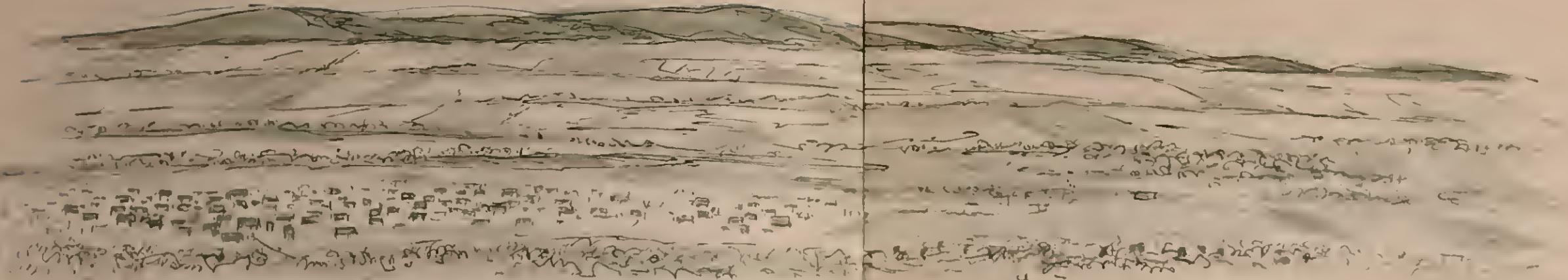
The blend of multiple uses stands forth clearly when you see how all resources are interrelated. Grass could not survive without water. Soil could not receive its por-

tion of water without deep-rooted sod. Grass holds and enriches the soil; it fattens cattle and sheep. Grass country supports a whole society of wildlife, linked together in mutual dependence. Water in streams and ponds serves man, livestock, and wildlife alike. And beside those waters grow trees, in whose shade man refreshes body and spirit.

### *The Ranger and the Resources*

The blend is no accident. Together with the people who use the land, the Forest Service Ranger plans and works to demonstrate a practical way of using the resources. Knowing the needs of the people and the capabilities of the land, he strikes a balance between the two, insuring a healthy future for both.

Come out into grass country and see the blend; see the tangible evidence of conservation in practice. You will find accomplishments stemming from the efforts of Federal, State, and local governments; of land owners and users; and local people from many walks of life interested in the land and its resource.



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On the National Grasslands you are surrounded by the handiwork of the Soil Conservation Service, the Forest Service, and other agencies.

Adding strength to the Government programs and extending the conservation principles to millions of adjacent acres are the cooperative efforts of ranchers, grazing associations, civic clubs, and sportsmen's groups. Many have shared in the work—work that still goes on—and all share in the benefits.

### *Grass for Livestock*

On the National Grassland you notice mostly the grass. But there is more. Miles of fences line the road or march out across the open plain, dividing the range into units that evenly distribute livestock grazing. Cattle and sheep graze in numbers that match the supply of grass. Water developments and salt licks are placed carefully, benefiting livestock and insuring full use of the range.





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### *Homes for Birds and Animals*

Most of the ponds and lakes on National Grasslands are the work of men rather than nature. They hold rainfall and snowmelt for the dry season. Their scattered locations disperse cattle evenly over the range. Fences often protect marshy areas on the ponds where waterfowl and wildlife nest and feed. Where practicable, the ponds are stocked with fish through the cooperative efforts of State game and fish authorities. Near a good fishing pond or hunting area, stiles over fences or gates permit easy access for sportsmen and save the fences from abuse.

In a land of little shade, picnic tables and fireplaces are placed in the most attractive grove of trees. Fences surround camp and picnic grounds to keep out livestock. Parking spaces, sanitary facilities, and clean water make these areas healthful and enjoyable.

### *Where Scars Remain*

This land of grass also bears scars, the record of a thoughtless past. In spite of years of effort by Soil Conservation Service technicians, Forest Rangers, and cooperators, some areas still show the marks of abuse by the plow or overgrazing. Dust still blows and gullies still gnaw at the land on abandoned farms. Instead of grass, yucca and sage grow where too many cattle once chewed grass to the roots and trampled the sod to dust.

Healthy sod, ponds, wildlife, and picnic areas, and healthy livestock—these are the plus side of the National Grasslands. And on the minus side are those lands that must yet be reclaimed. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate proper land use practices for conservation and full production on every National Grassland. Much has been done; much remains to be done—but the work is underway and progress is evident.

## *View From the Ridge*

From a high vantage point in the National Grassland, you will see at a glance all these elements of conservation and proper land use. In that panorama of sky and grass are the fences, the ponds or wells, and cattle or sheep grazing nearby. You might glimpse antelope disappearing into the distance, or be startled as a blur of feathers—a grouse or a pheasant—erupts from the grass before you. Down on a pond the ducks, plover, curlew, and the song of frogs tell how wildlife prospers.

In the distance a heavy green line of trees may trace the course of a stream down to a shimmering mass of reflected sunlight—a manmade lake. The wake of a powerboat, the glint of a parked auto, and the wisps of campfire smoke tell of the pleasure of healthful outdoor recreation.

## *The Rancher and National Grasslands*

Far away in another direction you see a cluster of buildings and trees; it is one of the ranches located within the National Grassland. The rancher owns a spread and rounds out his operations using the public range, for which he holds a permit and pays a fee. Very likely he also participates in the Program for the Great Plains, a region-wide Federal-State program designed to promote good grassland agriculture.

He belongs to a grazing association, through which he cooperates for the improvement and best use of all of the range, whether State, Federal, or privately owned. The association helps the rancher to coordinate his own range management with that of the adjacent lands. He and his neighboring ranchers, through their association, bear the cost of many range improvements, for they know the value of good grass in grass country.

## *A Road and a Town*

Beyond the ranch a road leads to town, and the town also is part of the National Grasslands portrait. Local business depends heavily on stable ranch operations in or near the National Grassland. Outdoor recreation opportunities on the public land enrich the lives of the people. One-fourth of the National Grassland's grazing fees and other receipts are paid to the county for support of its schools and maintenance of its roads.

There is truly much more than sky and grass on these windswept plains; consider the land, its resources, and the people. The work of many hands keeps the land productive. Should you look closer, you would find other work, perhaps not as noticeable but just as important—rodent control, protection against fire and insects, and research. This is all part of the job of managing your National Grasslands.



## *Your Man on the Plains*

The Forest Service Ranger works for the public—you and all Americans. His work goes on year after year, restoring the land and keeping it productive and healthy. He works not only with the land, but with many people: Ranchers, sportsmen, fish and game officers, and leaders in the local community.

# YOUR LAND—THE NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM

This is your outdoor empire, the National Forest System. It includes the 19 National Grasslands and 154 National Forests, with a total area of 186 million acres. All of these lands are managed to provide a never-failing supply of timber, grazing, water, wildlife, and outdoor recreation. For general



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information write to the Regional Forester for the area of your interest; addresses are listed on the inside cover facing page 16. Information about individual National Grasslands may be obtained by writing the Forest Supervisor at the appropriate administrative headquarters, as shown below.



National Grasslands		Administrative Headquarters
Region 1	Cedar River Grand River Little Missouri	Custer National Forest, Billings, Mont.
Region 2	Buffalo Gap	Black Hills National Forest, Custer, S. Dak.
	Cimarron Comanche	Son Isabel National Forest, Pueblo, Colo.
	Fort Pierre	Black Hills National Forest, Custer, S. Dak.
	Oglala	Nebraska National Forest, Lincoln, Nebr.
	Pawnee	Roosevelt National Forest, Fort Collins, Colo.
	Thunder Basin	Medicine Bow National Forest, Laramie, Wyo.
Region 3	Block Kettle Caddo Cross Timbers Kiowa McClellan Creek Rito Blanco	Panhandle National Grasslands, Amarillo, Tex.
Region 4	Curlew	Caribou National Forest, Pocatello, Idaho
Region 6	Crooked River	Ochoco National Forest, Prineville, Oreg.
Region 9	Sheyenne	Chippewa National Forest, Cross Lake, Minn.



## A LOOK TO THE PAST—AND THE PRESENT

Today some National Grasslands present a scene of quiet beauty. They give little hint of human misery or of parched earth churned into dust by burning winds. But these lands have known strife, poverty, and dust; they are part of the story of the National Grasslands—a story that is a lesson for the future.

The story turns on a recent date, June 20, 1960, when the Secretary of Agriculture designated 3,800,000 acres of Land Utilization Projects as the National Grasslands, giving permanent status to these public lands, and climaxing more than two decades of rehabilitation and conservation.

Establishment of the National Grasslands opened the way to a hopeful, productive future. The Forest Service now administers the National Grasslands as a permanent part of the National Forest System to promote stable grassland agriculture, a stronger economy, and the wise use of many resources.

### *Why National Grasslands?*

Two main factors led to establishment of National Grasslands—the way nature made

the land, and the way man used it. Nature decreed the geography and climate in which grass dominates the pattern of life. This is particularly true where National Grasslands are located. Civilized man took the land and used it in ways not always best for himself or the land. Attempts to correct mistakes led to land use adjustments, and these led to the National Grasslands.

Geological forces made this a land of grass. They raised the western plains to their present altitudes, usually 2,500 feet or more above sea level. Mountain ranges were thrust even higher. High mountains receive most of the rain and snow, so that less than 20 inches of rain normally falls on the western plains each year. Wind blows relentlessly—harder and longer than in any other part of the United States. Grass survives well on these high, windy plains; other plants must struggle to live.

### *From the Pages of History*

Grass country's story includes some dramatic chapters in our history. Within the relatively short span of a hundred years the

plains changed from the wild land of the Indian to a civilized country of farms, ranches, railroads, and towns. That century witnessed great explorations, the Oregon Trail, gold rushes, cattle drives, the days of open range, Indian wars, homestead settlement, and the closing of the American frontier. In short, those were the days when this part of the country was called the Wild West.

### *How the Land Was Used*

The people of the 19th century and what they did are part of the National Grasslands story. How they used the land set the stage for later developments. The Indian made little use of the land other than to hunt its abundant wildlife. The early cattlemen used the land as it was, but without thought of management. Finally the farmers came into grass country; they used

the land and managed it—but in some areas for purposes for which the land was not well suited.

### *Farming Brought Troubles*

In the National Grasslands areas, farmers began with trouble and kept it as long as they tried to farm grass country. Few could make a good living on 160 acres in the high plains, but 160 acres were all a man could homestead under the law. Most new settlers eked out a bare subsistence on their little farms. For the most part their land was poor and unsuited for intensive cultivation, but the farmers' hopes were in cash crops, not grass.

### *Dust Storms and Depression*

By the early 1930's the farmers' situation was critical. Depressed crop prices and drought ruined marginal farms. Many





people were supported by relief. Lands were abandoned or became tax delinquent. Debts mounted and mortgages were foreclosed.

There was less and less grass in grass country. Continual cultivation, recurrent dry years, excessive grazing, and relentless wind changes sod to dust. Farmlands were blowing away. Lands still in sod were severely damaged by dust blown from neighboring lands.

The hardships of those years are hard to imagine today. They impoverished the people, and overburdened the resources of communities, counties, and States. Many people left the land. Others were stranded by poverty, debt, and lack of opportunity.

### *Something Had To Be Done*

In 1934 a Federal land purchase program, adequate farm credit, and other measures brought much-needed relief. U.S. Department of Agriculture specialists worked with State agricultural colleges and State and county officials to determine the major problem areas. In these areas the Resettlement Administration purchased thousands of un-economic farms, retired them from intensive cultivation, and helped farm families find new opportunity in other areas.

### *Basic Change in Land Use*

The land purchase program brought about a basic change in land use. Men began to manage their lands in ways better suited to these dry, windy plains. Farms and ranches that remained were generally larger and better able to operate economically. The areas purchased were slowly rehabilitated and became summer pastures. Sheep and cattle now became the chief agricultural product in grass country.



### *Grass Returns*

Land Utilization Projects, as these areas were called, helped to bring grassland agriculture to the western plains. Grass resumed its rightful place as the dominant resource.

Under leadership of the Soil Conservation Service, grazing associations and Soil Conservation Districts were organized. They leased the new public ranges under controls guaranteeing range improvement and conservation. Land Utilization Project managers led the way in demonstrating conservation techniques and practices. Project managers, ranchers, and grazing associations worked together to improve the range in every respect. The work went forward and still goes forward, moving to the ultimate goal of a fully restored range.

### *Enter: National Grasslands*

Now the Land Utilization Projects on the plains have become the National Grasslands, and a part of the National Forest System. They are important units of a permanent system dedicated to principles of land conservation and use. The National Grasslands will thus demonstrate the practicability of sound conservation practices and promote development of grassland agriculture in the areas of which they are a part.

## A LESSON AND A PROMISE

America now has her National Grasslands, but they cannot be taken for granted. They teach a lesson, and the lesson must be learned. We Americans must learn that our real wealth is in the land and the resources nature alone gives us. These resources, when wisely used, help maintain a stable economy. Today's abundance must remain for generations of the future.

Forest Service Rangers and Soil Conservation Service technicians know the lesson the Grasslands teach. Over the years they have seen mistakes of the past written clearly on the soil, in rivers, and on the lives of people. They know that to destroy grass, or any renewable resource, is to destroy life.

In this land of sky and grass, old scars speak of the past—of difficult times that brought suffering to the country. Abandoned ruins softened by a mantle of grass tell the hardships. Fine pastures lie where men once farmed the dust; only with difficulty were many of these fields stabilized. Many an old homestead is marked only by an old wall, or rusted scraps of metal. And still there are gullied lands and blowing dust—challenges that cannot be put aside.

It is well to remember the past, for it has shown the mistakes, and the mistakes point the course that must be followed now. The past has shown that man is not always dominant, that he must live in harmony with grass country.





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So the lesson stands. The land is there to benefit all Americans, directly or indirectly, but only under wise use. National Grasslands will continue to yield their many resources—grass, water, outdoor recreation, wildlife, and wood. In this land of grass all these resources are linked together in the blend that is multiple use.

Every American is invited to visit the National Grasslands—to see them, to enjoy them, and to read the lesson that is written on the land. One can see where mistakes were made, where the land has been healed, and where work must yet be done. And in all of this there is a promise of a more abundant future.



This booklet is one of a series on the many uses and benefits of the water, timber, wildlife, forage, and recreation resources of the National Forest System. Other booklets in the series are *Wilderness, Skiing, Camping, Trees of the Forest—Their Beauty and Use*, and *Timber*.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Forest Service Regional Offices have available written information and maps describing the management and development of National Forest resources and the opportunities for hunting, fishing, camping, and other outdoor recreation. For such information you are invited to write the Regional Forester at any of the Regional Offices listed below:

Region 1: Federal Building Missoula, Mont., 59801	Region 6: Post Office Box 3623 Portland, Oreg., 97208
Region 2: Federal Center Building 85 Denver, Colo., 80225	Region 7: 6816 Market Street Upper Darby, Pa., 19082
Region 3: 517 Gold Avenue SW. Albuquerque, N. Mex., 87101	Region 8: 50 Seventh Street Atlanta, Ga., 30323
Region 4: Forest Service Building Ogden, Utah, 84403	Region 9: 710 N. 6th Street Milwaukee, Wis., 53203
Region 5: 630 Sansome Street San Francisco, Calif., 94111	Region 10: Fifth Street Office Building Post Office Box 1631 Juneau, Alaska, 99801

The Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, is dedicated to the principle of multiple use management of the Nation's forest resources for sustained yields of wood, water, forage, wildlife, and recreation. Through forestry research, cooperation with the States and private forest owners, and management of the National Forests and National Grasslands, it strives—as directed by Congress—to provide increasingly greater service to a growing Nation.

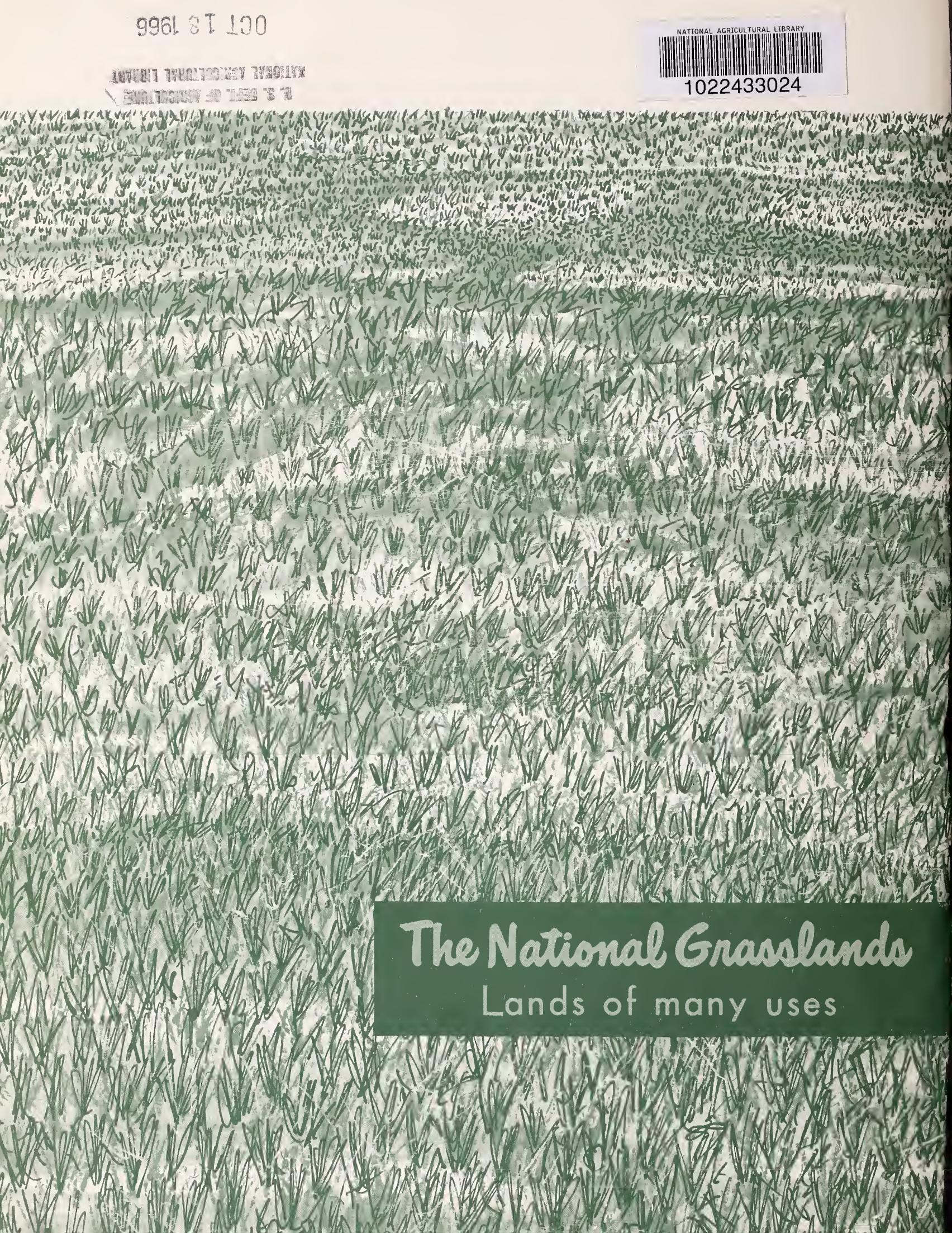
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The background of the entire page is a photograph of a dense, green grassy field, likely representing the 'National Grasslands' mentioned in the title.

# The National Grasslands

Lands of many uses